DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 141 685 CG 011 506

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TITLE Whose Marital Adjustment--Hers, His, or Theirs? (A Study of Communication, Marital Adjustment and Social Desirability).
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society (St. Louis, Missouri, April 21-24, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment Problems; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Family (Sociological Unit); *Family Relationship; Interaction Process Analysis; *Marriage; *Measurement Techniques; Research Problems; Research Projects; *Role Perception

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses two questions of widespread concern in literature on the family: (1) Is a score from one spouse adequate to measure marital adjustment? If not, how should the scores of the couple be treated to measure this concept? and (2) What is the effect of social desirability on responses to marital adjustment measures? Data from 44 paired couples (n 88) selected by a random process from a rural village some 12 miles from a university were collected. The Locke-Wallace short-form marital adjustment test, the Bienvenu communication scale, and the Crowne-Marlow Social Desirability scale were utilized. "Couple" scores were ascertained by three different assumption methods: (1) the partner whose "costs" overbalanced "profits" in the marital relationship would withdraw first from the marriage; (2) the partner whose "profits" exceeded "costs" would strive harder to maintain the marital relationship, and (3) the couple's marital adjustment score would be reflected best by an average. Results suggest that, should future research replicate these findings, scientists in family research would not need to be too concerned as to which indicator of marital adjustment to use nor about social desirability as a contaminating variable. (Author/CKJ)

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ED141685

WHOSE MARITAL ADJUSTMENT--HERS, HIS, OR THEIRS?

(A Study of Communication, Marital Adjustment and Social Desirability)

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STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The title reflects the quandary of researchers dealing with the topic of marital adjustment: are we dealing with each individual? or a couple? Should a marital adjustment score reflect the whole? or the parts?

In a number of instances where paired husbands and wives were involved in research, the correlation of spouses' marital adjustment scores have been about .60 (e.g., utilizing Locke-Wallace scale: Burgess and Wallin, 1944; Hurvitz, 1965; Price, 1969; Bienvenu, 1970; Pitsiou, 1971, 1973; Murstein and Beck, 1972; Spanier, 1972; Cole, 1973; and Dean and Lucas, 1974; utilizing Nye-MacDougall scale: Dean, 1966, 1968). Since the empirical correlations are noticeably less than unity, what really is the state of a couple's marital adjustment?

Typically, researchers in the area of the family employ some widely used test, such as Locke-Wallace or Nye-MacDougall, as a measurement of the concept of marital adjustment, then treat each respondent's score from the test as an indicator of marital adjustment. Basically, this traditional or "individual" approach to assessing marital adjustment collects data from "persons," either husbands or wives, without pairing specific spouses to one another. Analyzing data in this fashion allows investigators to speak only on marital adjustment for men occupying the "husband role" and women occupying the "wife role." Safilios-Rothschild (1969) and Spanier (1972) have noted that this approach may not be accurate in assessing the marital situation if one conceives of this concept as indicating the state of contentment of the married "couple" as a family unit. Some alternative approach is necessary whereby paired husband and wife scores are considered simultaneously to derive an indication of the marital contentment of the "couple."

Given current measurement sophistication, i.e., no instruments exist which are designed to simultaneously assess marital adjustment of husband and wife, it nevertheless seems that there are three methods of assessing marital adjustment of the "couple" from paired data. In each of these approaches, scores obtained from both the husband and the wife from the instrument used to measure marital adjustment (e.g. Locke-Wallace, Nye-MacDougall) would be used to derive marital adjustment scores. Here, marital adjustment scores would reflect an assessment of the respondents marriage, taking into consideration the mate's score as well as the score of the subject.

First, a MINIMUM marital adjustment score could be designated as the couple's marital adjustment score, assuming that the partner whose "costs" overbalanced "profits" in the marital relationship would be the most likely spouse to withdraw from the marriage. Alternatively, a MAXIMUM marital adjustment score could be designated as the couple's marital adjustment score, assuming that the partner whose "profits" exceeded "costs" would strive harder to maintain the marital relationship. Finally, a MEAN marital adjustment score could be calculated, assuming that the couple's marital adjustment score would be reflected by an average of the husband's and the wife's scores.

This research was undertaken primarily to determine the effect of utilizing each of the four approaches on empirical results. A secondary purpose was to investigate the relationship between social desirability and the indicators of marital adjustment. We are concerned here with two research questions: (1) How do various approaches to indicators of marital adjustment (individual, minimum, maximum, mean) compare within a common sample? and (2) Are the various indicators of marital adjustment differentially affected by social desirability?

PROCEDURES

The strategy employed to answer our research questions was to compare the relationships of the various indicators of marital adjustment with communication in a marriage, and then assess the effect of social desirability on these relationships since it has been suggested that the latter may be a confounding factor in the measurement of marital adjustment (e.g. Cone, 1967). Here, marital adjustment is treated as the "dependent" variable, communication as the "independent" variable, and social desirability as the "contaminating" variable. It should be noted that the relationship of communication to marital adjustment has been established in the family literature. Bienvenu (1970) reported a high positive correlation between his Communication scale and marital adjustment, Navran (1967) reported a correlation of .82 between his Primary Communication Inventory and his Marital Relationship Inventory, and Dean and Lucas (1974) reported a correlation of .73 between Bienvenu's Communication scale and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment scale. Such high correlations do, indeed, raise the question as to whether the scales purportedly measuring communication and marital adjustment may, despite the difference in titles, substantially be measuring the same thing. Although the subject of another paper, results of factor analysis of our data show that communication and marital adjustment are distinctly different phenomena.

Data for our analyses were collected from a sample of 44 married couples (description of sample and data gathering techniques to follow). Widely-used scales were included within the questionnaire to measure the concepts involved in this research: the Locke-Wallace short form Marital Adjustment test was utilized to measure "marital adjustment"; Bienvenu's Communication scale to measure "communication"; and the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability scale to

measure "social desirability." Alpha reliability coefficients were calculated to assess the reliability of these scales, and the results were as follows: Marital Adjustment .81; Communication .91; and Social Desirability .82.

Responses to items within the scales were weighted for purposes of attaining scale scores. The conventional weighting scheme was used for the marital adjustment scale (Locke-Wallace short form, 1959). The Certainty Method for 11-point scales (Warren, Klonglan, and Sabri, 1969) was used as the weighting scheme for the Communication and Social Desirability scales. This approach has the advantage of not making the assumption of equal intervals between responses, and is designed to give greater weight to the "end responses." Further, the format presents the respondent with two decisions: (1) first as to whether he agrees or disagrees with a particular item, and then (2) requests him to indicate how certain he is in his response. Weighting is as follows:

Agree	A1=9, A2=10, A3=11, A4=13, A5=16*
	AD = 8
Disagree	D1=7, D2=6, D3=5, D4=3, D5=0

*Negative items have a reversed scoring pattern

The primary concern of our research is to compare the various approaches to indicating marital adjustment discussed earlier. Here, marital adjustment is determined by either an "individual" or a "couple" approach. For data analyses, the person's (husband or wife) score from the Locke-Wallace short-form marital adjustment test will be treated as an indicator of the INDIVIDUAL marital adjustment score. "Couple" scores will be ascertained by three different methods. A MINIMUM marital adjustment score will be treated as an indicator of the couple's marital adjustment (both husband and wife assigned the same score) as determined by the lower score obtained of the husband-wife pair. A MAXIMUM marital adjustment score will be treated as the couple's marital adjustment score (both husband

and wife assigned the same score) as determined by the higher score obtained of the husband-wife pair. Finally, a MEAN marital adjustment score will be treated as the couple's marital adjustment score and determined by the arithmetic mean of the sum of the husband's and the wife's score. Here, again, both the husband and wife are assigned this score as their marital adjustment score for data analysis procedures. Comparisons of zero-order correlation coefficients between the various indicators of marital adjustment and communication will be made, as well as examination of these correlations partialling out the effect of social desirability.

SAMPLE

Fifteen-page questionnaires containing the several scales and social background items were hand-distributed by a class of graduate students during the summer of 1973. Since convenience necessarily was a factor in this non-funded research, a village with a population of somewhat less than a 1,000 located 12 miles from a university city in the midwest was selected as the research scene. Every third residence was initially selected for data collection, omitting businesses, etc. Because of a fairly large number of elderly, widowed people, it became necessary to make substitutions. The next residence forward or back was selected. Since the research interest was in the relationship between variables and not a description of the parent population, it was felt that this procedure was justifiable.

Respondents were requested not to consult while filling out the questionnaires, and to place their forms in an individual envelope and seal it. Where possible, questionnaires were collected the same night as the original distribution; in some cases, a day or two later. This procedure yielded a set of fully-useable schedules from 44 paired couples (88 individuals), plus a few from one partner of a marriage.

The mean score on the North-Hatt Occupational Prestige Scale for the husbands was 65, as compared to the national median of about 70 (North and Hatt, 1947). The median income was in the $11,000 - $12,999 bracket. Thus the sample may be termed middle-class (where, of course, most of the research on marital adjustment has been conducted). Well over half (73.8 percent) the respondents were under forty years of age; none were younger than twenty. Most of the respondents reported their maximum formal education level to be high school graduate or some college training without completion of degree requirements (41.4 percent and 33.3 percent, respectively). Generally, husbands were somewhat more likely to report formal education beyond high shcool than wives (nearly 64 percent of the husbands, about 57 percent of the wives). The length of marriage ranged from one to more than twenty years. The category of six to ten years was the most frequently reported (31.8 percent) and slightly more than half (56.8 percent) had been married less than ten years. Nearly all (96.6 percent) spouses reported their present marriage as their first. Most of the subjects reported their religious affiliation to be Protestant (87.4 percent).

RESULTS

Table I presents the mean values for the various indicators of marital adjustment, communication, and social desirability within the sample. Examination of the different marital adjustment means leads one to expect some variability in analysis outcomes, depending upon which approach is used to designate marital adjustment scores. For example, there is a difference of nearly 17 points between the mean values for minimum and maximum marital adjustment for the total sample.

TABLE I ABOUT HERE

Comparisons of mean differences presented for husbands and wives on the variables in Table I follows the traditional approach to assessing marital

adjustment (where data is collected from "persons" occupying either the "husband" or "wife" role). Here, the focus is on individual marital adjustment, communication, and social desirability within the husband or wife groups. There is little difference in the mean values for individual marital adjustment between husbands and wives, 115.06 and 115.78 respectively, and husband and wife scores correlate here at .61. Mean scores for communication were somewhat higher for wives than for husbands (213.12 and 174.47 respectively). Wives also had higher means for social desirability (203.76 and 164.93). Calculated t values indicate that the observed differences between husbands and wives on communication ($t = -3.63$) and social desirability ($t = -5.427$) are significant at the .05 level, while individual marital adjustment ($t = -.509$) is not significant.

Continuing with the traditional approach to assessing adjustment, the relationship of individual marital adjustment to communication was compared between husband and wife groups. Results of analysis shows that wives' individual marital adjustment and communication scores correlated higher than do husband's scores (.82 and .61 respectively). However, wives' individual marital adjustment and social desirability scores correlated lower than did husband's scores (.22 and .43 respectively). Partialling out the effect of social desirability on individual marital adjustment and communication results in reducing the husband's correlation from .61 to .52, but the wives' correlation only from .82 to .81. The apparent greater impact of social desirability on husband's scores compared to wives' scores may be negligible. Results of step-wise regression analyses indicate that adding social desirability after communication did not significantly (.05 level) explain more variance in individual marital adjustment for either wives (R^2 increase = .003; $F = .354$) or husbands

(R^2 increase = .04; F = 2.738). Additionally, further regression procedures[1] indicated that the relationship of individual marital adjustment to communication scores was not significantly different when comparing husband and wife groups, thus suggesting that a husband-wife differentiation would not be necessary for this analysis.

We now turn our attention to the primary research question noted earlier: i.e., a comparison of the various reference points of the indicators of marital adjustment. Here a new, non-traditional approach to assessing marital adjustment was implemented wherein data from paired husbands and wives are analyzed, using in turn, various "anchor points" of the "couples" marital adjustment. MINIMUM, MAXIMUM, and MEAN marital adjustment are all "couple" scores. That is, each takes into consideration the mate's marital adjustment score as well as the score of the subject. These are in contrast to INDIVIDUAL marital adjustment, which reflects only the individual respondent's score on the marital adjustment scale.

Correlations noting the relationships of the various indicators of marital adjustment with communication, and the effect of social desirability on these indicators, are presented in Table II. Here, data from the total sample (N=88) is used in analysis.

TABLE II ABOUT HERE

The major finding from examination of the first column of Table II indicates that there is little or no difference in the correlation values for marital

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[1] Blalock (1971:145) recommends that when comparing across populations, in this case husband and wife groups, unstandardized regression coefficients rather than standardized correlation values should be used. (See Blalock (1964:50-52) and Blalock (1972:383-384) for further considerations concerning appropriate uses of correlation and regression coefficients). Here, regression procedures with dummy variables indicated that a pooled slope for husband and wife groups was appropriate for analysis. (See Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973:233-237) for analytical procedures used here).

adjustment and communication scores, regardless of which method of assessing marital adjustment is used. The correlations for INDIVIDUAL, MINIMUM, MAXIMUM, and MEAN marital adjustment and communication are .73, .73, .71, and .76, respectively. Results of t-tests[2] using these correlation values showed that there was no significant difference (.05 level) between any of these correlations: INDIVIDUAL-MEAN, t= -.023; INDIVIDUAL-MAXIMUM, t = .202; INDIVIDUAL-MEAN, t = -.339; MINIMUM-MAXIMUM, t = .220; MINIMUM-MEAN, t = -.033; and MAXIMUM-MEAN, t = -.560.

As may be noted, the zero-order correlation coefficients obtained between communication and marital adjustment were fairly consistent with research reported earlier (Navran, 1967; Bienvenu, 1970). This is noteworthy in view of the fact that in this research the Certainty Method format was employed, whereas Bienvenu presented a 3-point Likert-type scale and Navran a 5-point Likert-type scale.

The second column of Table II reports the correlation coefficients for social desirability and marital adjustment scores. Since several have questioned the possible effect of social desirability (e.g. Cone, 1967), it is noted that the magnitude of correlation between social desirability and marital adjustment in its various forms are in the range of .26 to .35 -- about the same as Hawkins (1966) found for the Locke-Wallace scale. Although there is some variability in the correlation values here (INDIVIDUAL = .30; MINIMUM = .26; MAXIMUM = .35; MEAN = .31), results of t-tests show that there is no significant difference (.05 level) between any of these correlations: INDIVIDUAL-MINIMUM, t = .743; INDIVIDUAL-MAXIMUM, t = .044; INDIVIDUAL-MEAN, t = -.180; MINIMUM-MAXIMUM, t = - 1.773; MINIMUM-MEAN, t = 1.280; and MAXIMUM-MEAN, t = .743.

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[2]See Blalock (1972:407) for analytical procedures used here.

Partial correlation coefficients reporting the relationship of communication to the various indicators of marital adjustment, controlling for the effect of social desirability, are presented in the third column of Table II. A comparison of each of these values with the appropriate zero order correlation (column 1 of Table II) shows that social desirability is producing only a minimal effect on these relationships. Controlling for social desirability reduces the correlation coefficients of communication with (1) INDIVIDUAL marital adjustment from .73 to .70, (2) MINIMUM marital adjustment from .73 to .71, (3) MAXIMUM marital adjustment from .71 to .67, and (4) MEAN marital adjustment from .76 to .73. Further, step-wise regression analyses indicated that adding social desirability after communication did not significantly (.05 level) explain more variance in INDIVIDUAL (R^2 increase = .001; F = .205), MINIMUM (R^2 increase = .0003; F = .053), MAXIMUM (R^2 increase = .009; F = 1.505), and MEAN (R^2 increase = .007; F = .216) marital adjustment.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The major concern of this paper has been to assess how various approaches to assessing marital adjustment (INDIVIDUAL, MINIMUM, MAXIMUM, MEAN) compare within a common sample, and to assess the effect of social desirability on the measurement of marital adjustment. Results of analyses of data collected from 44 married couples (N=88) showed that there was no significant difference in the relationships of communication and marital adjustment scores, regardless of whether uses of an "individual" approach as an indicator of marital adjustment, reflecting only the particular respondents score on the marital adjustment scale, or any of the "couple" approaches (MINIMUM, MAXIMUM, MEAN) as an indicator of marital adjustment. Further, the impact of social desirability on the measurement of marital adjustment was found to be negligible. Social

desirability did not significantly add to the explanation of variance in marital adjustment in any case.

These findings lead to the conclusion that the issue of whether one uses an "individual" or any of the "couple" approaches to determine marital adjustment scores need not overly concern scientists, in spite of the very plausible theoretical questions raised. Additionally, our results support Hawkins' (1966) and Murstein and Beck's (1972) findings that social desirability is not significantly affecting the measurement of marital adjustment.

In stating the above conclusions, we recognize two major limitations to this study: 1) a small number of respondents, and 2) selected from a limited, homogeneous population. Future research should secure larger samples of married couples, from more heterogeneous populations. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate other variables associated with marital adjustment such as commitment or emotional maturity. One also could query whether these results would be replicated when grouping the data by different periods of the life cycle of marriages. Should future research, incorporating these dimensions, replicate our findings, scientists in family research would need not be concerned as to which mode of marital adjustment was used, nor be concerned about social desirability as a contaminating variable.

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TABLE I

MEAN SCORES OF MEASURES EMPLOYED

	Total Sample (N=88)	Husbands (N=44)	Wives (N=44)
Marital Adjustment			
+ Individual	115.42	115.06	115.78
* Minimum	107.12	- -	- -
* Maximum	123.72	- -	- -
+* Mean	115.42	- -	- -
Communication	208.44	203.76	213.12
Social Desirability	196.70	164.93	174.47

+ "Individual" and "Mean" marital adjustment scores across the ample are identical due to arithmetic processes involved in calculating the average scores for these variables.

* Average "Husbands" and "Wives" scores for "Minimum," "Maximum," and "Mean" marital adjustment are identical to values listed for the total sample. This is due to the fact that both spouses are assigned the same score for these variables as an indicator of the "Couple's" marital adjustment

TABLE II

CORRELATIONS OF COMMUNICATION, MARITAL ADJUSTMENT, AND SOCIAL DESIRABILITY

	Communication and Marital Adjustment (zero order)	Social Desirability and Marital Adjustment	Communication and Marital Adjustment, Social Desirability controlled
Marital Adjustment			
Individual	.731	.304	.699
Minimum	.734	.257	.711
Maximum	.713	.352	.670
Mean	.762	.314	.732